

Trend of Interpersonal Trust—Prospects under COVID-19 Pandemic

Subjects: Psychology

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As an important basis for interpersonal communication and association, interpersonal trust is a significant guarantee for inter-organizational and organizational negotiation and cooperation, a vital factor affecting organizational performance, and a crucial indicator to measure the harmonious and stable development of society. Retrospecting articles on interpersonal trust is of great importance for understanding its current status and future development in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially, with the widespread use of Big Data and Blockchain.

Keywords: interpersonal trust ; evolution trend ; co-occurrence analysis ; cluster analysis

1. Introduction

In the mid-19th century, Deutsch started the research of interpersonal trust when conducting a prisoner's dilemma experiment, and found "interpersonal trust" as the disadvantage of something that does not happen as expected and may outweigh the benefit of wishing to happen ^[1]. Then, Rotter developed the Interpersonal Trust Scale (ITS), which inspired scholars to think about the dimensions of interpersonal trust and fostered their interest in measuring the scale ^[2]. At the end of 20th century, with economic globalization and organizational socialization, the research on interpersonal trust entered a period of theoretical explosion. Scholars began to systematically study the influencing factors and effects of interpersonal trust, and put forward development stage theory, rational choice theory, social system theory (social structure and social culture theory), etc., which laid a solid foundation for the following research. Since the 21st century, with economic development and social stability becoming important concerns, interpersonal trust at the organizational level and social level has received increasing attention. Scholars have focused on the role of interpersonal trust on organizational citizenship behavior, management practice, and organizational performance ^[3], and the role of interpersonal trust between organizations on communication, negotiation, contract signing ^{[4][5]}. They linked interpersonal trust with social institution and culture, meanwhile believing that social norms, culture, values interact with interpersonal trust ^[6]. In addition, the outbreak of public crises such as financial crises, hurricanes, and pandemic has led to the research development on trust in the field of public crises. However, scholars paid attention mainly to the role of generalized trust (social trust) and political trust in public crisis management ^[7], ignoring the fact that interpersonal trust is the basis of generalized trust and political trust. Moreover, COVID-19 further highlights that interpersonal trust is an invisible power resolving social risks, since it has a positive impact on alleviating negative emotions and participating in rescue operations ^[8].

Existing studies provide extensive research on trust between different roles, such as doctor–patient trust, consumer trust, and interpersonal trust within the organization. Those research constructed a theoretical framework centered on personality trait theory, human relations theory, rational decision theory, social system theory, enriched the definition and characteristics of interpersonal trust, clarified the influence of factors such as individual characteristics, interpersonal style, values, risk perception, social support, social culture, institutions, solved the problem of measuring interpersonal trust between different roles and different regions, and verified the vital effect of interpersonal trust on individual psychology and behavior, organization operation and management, social stability and development.

However, there are still some problems and challenges, which are mainly reflected in the following: (1) There is less research on interpersonal trust, and the topics are mostly about trust and organizational trust ^[9]; (2) There are many definitions of interpersonal trust, but there is a relative lack of summary ^[4]; (3) There is a lack of the use of scientific measurement methods; (4) The research perspective needs to be broadened, and there is a lack of backgrounds such as COVID-19 pandemic and digital governance.

The bibliometrics was used to effectively avoid the cognitive bias caused by subjective judgments to a certain extent. After summarizing the basic situation of the research on interpersonal trust, it was found that the theoretical literature and hot

topics of the research on interpersonal trust, and the definition and hot topics were summarized according to the three levels of individual, organization, and society, presenting the development clue of the research on interpersonal trust, filling up the gaps of interpersonal trust in recent years, enriching the theoretical basis of interpersonal trust in public crisis response, providing valuable references for the use of digital technologies such as big data and blockchain to conduct research on interpersonal trust in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. International Research Progress and Evolution Trend of Interpersonal Trust

2.1. Articles Structure Features

Developed countries have contributed the most to the research of interpersonal trust. From the perspective of the publication number, the publications of the nine developed countries in **Table 1** account for about 86% of the total. From the perspective of highly cited authors and literature, all most cited authors in **Table 2** are from developed countries. The United States has contributed the most to the study of interpersonal trust. From the perspective of the publication number, in **Table 1**, the publication number of the United States accounts for about 42.58% of the total publications. From the perspective of most cited authors and articles, the 15 most cited authors are Americans in **Table 2**. In addition, the contribution of China, the largest developing country, to the research of interpersonal trust cannot be ignored, because China is the country with the second largest publication number.

Table 1. Top 10 countries/regions and institutions publication status.

Rank	High Publication Countries		High Publication Institution	
	Country/Region	Number (%)	Institution	Number (%)
1	US	758 (42.58)	University of Minnesota	25 (1.40)
2	China	252 (14.16)	Vrije University Amsterdam	25 (1.40)
3	UK	173 (9.72)	City University of Hong Kong	23 (1.29)
4	Germany	124 (6.97)	University of Wisconsin	21 (1.18)
5	Canada	103 (5.79)	Northwestern University	20 (1.12)
6	The Netherlands	103 (5.79)	University of Michigan	19 (1.07)
7	Australia	100 (5.62)	Harvard University	17 (0.96)
8	Spain	59 (3.32)	Michigan State University	16 (0.90)
9	South Korea	58 (3.26)	University of Amsterdam	16 (0.90)
10	Swedish	41 (2.30)	Georgia State University	15 (0.84)

Table 2. Top 20 most cited authors and their research content.

Rank	Author	Citation Frequency	Published Year	Content
1	Rotter JB ^[2]	789	1967	Interpersonal Trust Scale
2	Mayer RC ^[9]	666	1995	Dimensions of interpersonal trust
3	Putnam RD ^[10]	600	1994	Trust and social capital
4	Lewicki RJ ^[11]	587	1996	A review of different disciplines of interpersonal trust
5	Rousseau DM ^[12]	432	1998	A review of interpersonal trust in organization and between organizations
6	Dirks KT ^[13]	411	2002	Meta-analysis of leadership trust
7	Kramer RM ^[14]	392	1998	How to strengthen interpersonal trust in an organization
8	McKnight DH ^[15]	382	2002	Consumer trust in electronic commerce

Rank	Author	Citation Frequency	Published Year	Content
9	McAllister DJ ^[16]	363	1995	Measurement of interpersonal trust within an organization
10	Deutsch M ^[1]	317	1958	The definition of interpersonal trust
11	Zaheer A ^[17]	311	1998	The influence of inter-organizational trust and interpersonal trust on organizational Performance
12	Williamson OE ^[18]	305	1993	Rational decision making of interpersonal trust
13	Yamagishi T ^[19]	297	1994	Cross-cultural comparison of general trust
14	Coleman J ^[20]	287	1994	Relation of trust and social capital
15	Luhmann N ^[21]	285	1979	The social function of trust
16	Gefen D ^[22]	276	2002	Consumer trust under electronic commerce
17	Fukuyama F ^[23]	268	1995	The social function of trust
18	Lewis JD ^[24]	222	1985	The social function of trust
19	Butler J ^[25]	222	1991	Conditions of Trust Inventory
20	Hardin R ^[26]	218	1993	Bayesian trust model

2.2. Clustering Analysis of High-Frequency Keywords

In order to summarize the main research themes of interpersonal trust, this study divided the 14 clusters obtained above into 4 thematic clusters according to the high-frequency keywords and specific research content. The four thematic clusters are as follows: individual psychology and behavior, including #3 trust beliefs, #6 forgiveness, #13 behavioral economics; organization operation and management, including #1 employees' behavior, #8 collaboration, #9 Chinese Guanxi, #10 knowledge management; social stability and development, including #0 social capital, #2 generalized trust, #4 social support, #7 geological disasters, #11 bias; and research methods, including #5 meta-analysis, #12 measurement.

Individual psychology and behavior (#3, #6, #13) mainly focuses on the influence of personality characteristics, interactive psychology and behavior of interpersonal trust, as well as the effect of interpersonal trust on individual psychology and behavior. "Trust beliefs" is often used to measure interpersonal trust, and competence, kindness and integrity are the three most representative trust beliefs ^[15]. In the era of Internet, scholars have also verified technical trust beliefs (function, reliability and helpfulness), interpersonal trust beliefs (competence, benevolence and integrity), and considered these two beliefs could simultaneously affect the interpersonal trust in the network, promoting the research of online interpersonal trust ^[27]. "Forgiveness" plays an important role in the repairing process after the destruction of trust, because apology could foster the forgiveness behavior of the trust damaged party ^[28]. "Behavioral economics" embodies the reciprocal purpose and economic role of interpersonal trust, the basis of rational decision making of interpersonal trust. Moreover, interpersonal trust would increase as costs decreases and benefits increases ^[29].

Organization operation and management (#1, #8, #9, #10) mainly focuses on the influence of employee and leader behavior in the organization of interpersonal trust, and the effect of interpersonal trust on organizational performance. "Employees' behavior" and "collaboration" are eternal topics of organization operation and management. The behavior of employees' dependence on leaders would significantly affect their trust in leader, which in turn affects organizational performance. Similarly, human resource practices such as cultivation of employee competence from the leader, employee dependence and rewards can apparently improve interpersonal trust and strengthen cooperation and innovative behaviors ^[30]. In addition, for the organizations with high interpersonal trust, the more willing the employees are to cooperate, the more positive effects they can produce. By contrast, organizations lacking interpersonal trust would suffer from the opposite effects ^[31]. "Knowledge management" is an important method to stimulate organizational innovation and maintain organizational competitiveness. In reality, transformational leaders could improve interpersonal trust and knowledge sharing behavior by creating a knowledge sharing atmosphere ^[32]. In the virtual network, organizations could enhance the social interaction of employees through online technology to establish interpersonal trust and promote the willingness to share knowledge ^[33]. "Chinese Guanxi", including kinship, friendship and geographical relationship, is often

generated from the effective trust of Chinese people. Likewise, it has three characteristics: familiarity (intimacy), trust and mutual obligation [34], which reflect the Chinese concept of family culture and sensible society. Chinese Guanxi is considered to be an informal interaction. Face and gift, etc., not only promote interpersonal interaction, but also play a special role in decision making within the organization and negotiation between organizations. In other words, it can reduce the uncertainty of decision-making within the organization, and improve the performance of inter-organizational contracts. With the development of the politicization of organizations, Chinese Guanxi also brings some drawbacks to the development of organizations like nepotism, but the negative impact of human relations in business interaction could be alleviated to a certain extent by increasing calculative trust and weakening benevolence trust [35].

Social stability and development (#0, #2, #4, #7, #11) is the focus of interpersonal trust. Scholars mainly discussed the influence of politics, institution and culture on interpersonal trust, as well as the positive role of interpersonal trust in improving social fairness, social cohesion and public crisis management. "Social capital" includes generalized trust or interpersonal trust, reciprocity guidelines and civic anticipation networks [15]. Social capital is the upstream social determinant of mental health, and its intervention policies could be functioned as an effective way to promote mental health and help relieve depression and stress. Meanwhile, the economic role of social capital reinforces regional communication and interaction, making it an indispensable foundation for the development of cultural and ethnic diversity [36]. In addition, the specifically social capital of company established through social responsibility activities could gain considerable economic return when the financial crisis has reduced interpersonal trust [37]. "Generalized trust" is the manifestation of interpersonal trust at the society level, which is equivalent to social trust [7]. Society with high degree of generalized trust owns better government institutions, higher economic growth and greater capacity to resolve public crises. "Social support" and interpersonal trust are good mediators of the relationship between perceived organizational politics and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, stress, and burnout. In the relationship research between doctors and patients, the effective and informative support of doctors helped patients relieve their physical and psychological burden [38]. "Geological disasters", such as tsunamis, hurricanes and earthquakes, caused tremendous damage to lives and property. The role of interpersonal trust on individual mental health made it a momentous factor in public crisis management and evaluation. Accordingly, measuring and evaluating interpersonal trust before, during and after a public crisis is conducive to crisis management. In response to public crises, people involved in public affairs would quickly form a sense of collaboration, so that interpersonal trust is to be quickly established and fostered in the recovery period of disaster [39]. During recent years, pandemics such as COVID-19 and Ebola have led to the development of interpersonal trust in the field of public crisis. When a public health emergency broke out, authorities expanded communication channels and released comprehensive information in time, reducing the phenomenon of distrust caused by human-to-human transmission [40]. "Bias" mainly refers to the difference of interpersonal trust between men and women. In the cross-cultural research, women considerably have low trust in Thailand and Hong Kong, while in Australia, men have low trust in strangers, and women have low trust to foreigners [41]. Additionally, racial prejudice is also a political and cultural factor affecting interpersonal trust. The 2014 World View Value Survey found that white people had higher trust than black people did.

Research methods (#5, #12) mainly studies the scale method of interpersonal trust measurement, the game method of the influence of reciprocal preference and altruistic preference between two parties, and the meta-analysis method of summarizing variables of interpersonal trust. "Meta-analysis" is used to study the antecedents and outcome variables of interpersonal trust. Scholars used meta-analysis method to analyze the individual characteristics, such as competence, integrity and benevolence, individual behaviors in the organization, such as organizational citizenship behavior, dependent behavior and power differentiation, innovative behavior and sharing behavior. Furthermore, organizational performance, employee satisfaction and income level have always been the research content that scholars care about [42]. "Measurement" has always been a hot topic of interpersonal trust. The most commonly used scales are Interpersonal Trust Scale [2], Specific Interpersonal Trust Scale, Trust Scale, and Trust in Physician Scale. Game method is the most commonly used laboratory method. Early trust games focused on the transaction cost, gains or losses risks, finding that interpersonal trust would increase with the decrease of cost and the increase of cooperation benefits, and decrease with the increase of betrayal benefits. In recent years, transcranial Direct Current Stimulation (tDCS) and functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) have been introduced into the trust game to study the micro-influencing mechanism of emotion, reciprocity and interpersonal trust. It has been found that the negative influence would interrupt the trust behavior between the left temporal parietal and posterior superior temporal sulcus, and activate the activity of the anterior insula [43].

2.3. The Evolution by Time Clues

In order to further figure out the evolution of research hotspots by time sequence, this study first divided the research progress into four stages, then explored the evolution at every stages. In line with the statistics of publication number and

the analysis of most cited authors, the total publication number from 1956 to 1989 was only 72 (see **Figure 1**), and the most cited articles were concentrated in 1990 to 2000 (see **Table 2**). Consequently, this study defined the period before 1990 as the germination stage, the period from 1990 to 2000 as the growth stage, and the period from 2001 to the present as the outbreak stage.

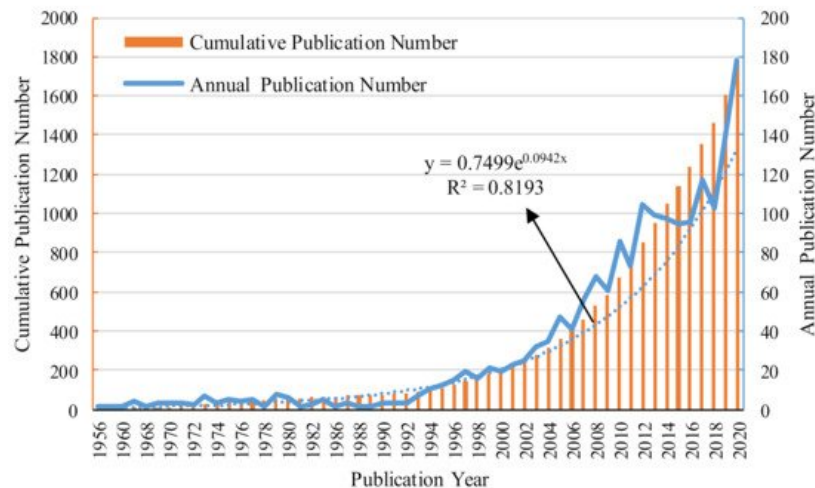


Figure 1. Article publication status.

Germination stage (1956–1989). During this period, the research focused on fields of psychology, economics and sociology, presenting a research trend of joint development at the individual and society levels. Since Deutsch, the American social psychologist, put forward the first definition of interpersonal trust, interpersonal trust formally entered the research scope of scholars. Conceptual definitions, influencing factors and scales were the main research content of this stage.

Growth stage (1990–2000). During this period, the research scope was expanded to organizational behavior and management. Interpersonal trust developed into social trust (generalized trust) at the society level, and organizational trust (interpersonal trust within the organization) at the organization level, showing the evolution characteristics from the level of individual to society and then to organization. Scholars further promoted research on conceptual definitions, influencing factors and scales, and started research on the destruction and restoration of interpersonal trust, as well as cross-cultural research. At the individual level, some scholars maintained that interpersonal trust was a kind of prediction of whether one's own interests changed and that it underwent a dynamic development of establishment, development, decline and restoration [11]. Some scholars developed Trust in Physician Scale and Conditions of Trust Inventory based on the Interpersonal Trust Scale and existing research [25]. At the society level, with the emergence of population aging and social inequality, scholars began to pay attention to the relationship between institution, economy and culture and interpersonal trust. Some scholars compared the interpersonal trust of different countries, and concluded that social culture, economy, norms and regulations were major reasons affecting interpersonal trust. Furthermore, some scholars associated social capital with trust and believed that interpersonal trust was an essential part of social capital [20][23]. At the organization level, with economic globalization and organizational socialization, scholars discovered the relationship between interpersonal trust and human resource management practices played an important role in improving corporate performance. As a result, interpersonal trust at the organization level attracted wide attention. Scholars thus found that interpersonal trust within an organization had a positive impact on goal determination, organizational performance, monitoring costs and innovative behavior.

Outbreak stage (2001–2020). During this period, the development of medical technology, such as tDCS and fMRI technology, extended the research to the field of neurology. Simultaneously, the development of computer technology, such as Big Data and Blockchain, also led the research to the fields of communication engineering and computer science. In this stage, interpersonal trust research presented the characteristics of multi-disciplinary, coordinated development at individual, organization, society levels. At the individual level, the trust game experiment has been enriched by tDCs and fMRI, and the generation and action mechanism of interpersonal trust has been studied from the neural network. At the organization level, it is believed that organizational management practices, such as knowledge sharing, job support, staff reliability and team management, were affected by interpersonal trust [32]. Additionally, the potential of Big Data and Blockchain in enhancing interpersonal trust has also been proved. Big Data and Blockchain could improve the reliability and transparency of information in information management, ensure the effective knowledge sharing, and promote trust consensus [44]. At the society level, on the one hand, scholars continued to pay attention to cross-cultural research, and maintained that the stronger organizational supervision is, the better social norms and legal systems are, the higher

interpersonal trust and social trust would be. By further comparing the influence of differences in trust culture between different countries on negotiation cooperation, it was found that negotiators could avoid the influence of trust culture differences as long as they adopted strategies to improve common interests ^[45]. On the other hand, the role of computer technology was studied in interpersonal trust when a public crisis occurred. The analysis capabilities of Big Data and Blockchain could decrease the establishment time of trust between military and civilian and improve inter-organizational collaboration performance ^[46].

During the germination stage, researchers formed the personality trait theory and human relations theory. During the growth stage, researchers put forward rational decision-making theory, social system theory (social structure and social culture theory), and personality trait theory and human relations theory had been further developed. During the outbreak stage, researches mainly concentrated on the human relations theory and social system theory to probe the level of interpersonal trust under social events, as well as calculating the level of interpersonal trust in the laboratory.

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